An Aesthetic Inheritance: Investigating the Picturesque Photograph and Its Vantage Point

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PhD Dissertation, Goldsmiths College, University of London (2015)

An Extract from Chapter 2 – *Vantage Point and the Picturesque Gaze*

Experience of the Picturesque in the eighteenth century could in some ways be regarded as performative. Although it was the painting of the previous century that sparked the interest in engaging with and capturing a wilder form of nature, the trend initiated by Gilpin was to actively pursue it, to leave behind the comforts of home and hunt it down. For this reason, Picturesque qualities are found in images that have a certain immediacy, where the scene conveys the experience of the traveller who suddenly happens upon the perfect combination of Picturesque ingredients – trees, hills, lake, just the right kind of light, just the right kind of people self-absorbed in the foreground. The self-absorbed rustic as a Picturesque figure offers more than the textures of dishevelment and an indifference to the viewer's presence. Their true value in Picturesque terms lies in their lack of awareness of their pitiful state. In other words, their condition of hardship is one that only we recognize, the extent of their rustic innocence is such that they endure their condition without any pronounced awareness of what they lack. A good example of this is seen in the leech-gatherer who is at the centre of Wordsworth's poem *Resolution and Independence* (1807). Having lost his wife and ten children the leech-gatherer demonstrates extreme resilience in continuing to earn his living by collecting leeches from muddy pools in a desolate landscape. Wordsworth paints a picture of a pitiful figure yet one who is self-absorbed and resilient:

> Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
> Nor all asleep -in his extreme old age:
> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
> As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
> Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
> A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

In later verses Wordsworth's declared admiration for the leech-gatherer is seen to extend from the man's entire lack of self-pity, a fortitude that in turn derives from an absence of awareness of how he might by perceived by the narrator.

Perhaps a significant aspect of the self-absorption of the Picturesque figure is the expression of limited visual scope, which in turn marks the Picturesque figure as distinct from ‘ourselves’. Whilst we, from outside the picture, have an all-encompassing view, the Picturesque figure, self-absorbed, looks no further than their immediate vicinity. The viewpoint of Claude’s shepherds, both in terms of their line of vision and their comprehension of their circumstance, seems incomplete compared to our own. In his essay, *Public Prospect and Private View*, John Barrell discusses the ways in which the panoramic landscapes of eighteenth century painting offer a visual equivalence of the enlightened view of the world available to certain social classes. Barrell contrasts the panoramic view with the 'occluded' view, where restricted vision prohibits the kind of understanding necessary to interpret the world abstractly. In this way, enjoyment of the idealized landscape is solely in the hands of the socially advantaged and this in turn segregates those who can observe from those who cannot and must instead occupy the role of observed. Barrell writes:

> Those who can comprehend the order of society and nature are the observers of a prospect, in which others are merely objects. Some comprehend, others are comprehended; some are fit to survey the extensive panorama, some are confined within one or other of the micro-prospects which, to the comprehensive observer, are parts of a wider landscape, but which, to those confined within them, are all they see (Barrell, 1993: 27-28).

Drawing from Barrell, we might say that this perceived micro negotiation of the world sets the Picturesque figure apart from our macro understanding. Those within the landscape rather than outside of it negotiate their environment myopically. They are unable to step back and make the necessary connections to observe a Picturesque whole. They merely react, governed by ‘what strikes the senses or are the first motions of the mind’ (ibid.). Barrell later adds, 'One of the main pleasures the sophisticated readers take in pastoral is that it exhibits a state

of mind which is delightfully simple in itself' (ibid.). With all rivalries and obstacles removed the outside observer is free to take possession of the scene but also to enjoy its containment. Set within the frame, it is true, there is potential recognition of artifice through awareness of the pictures' edges, but the curtailment of the image also serves the purpose of eliminating any threat: frames restrict the eye but in equal measure they protect our vision from contradiction. The contradiction in this case might be merely the disorder beyond the frame. By offering the proposition of nature as wayward but ultimately predictable and harmonious the Picturesque is able to fulfil any viewer's hope of finding an underlying natural order. The self-containment of the Picturesque might in this sense play a significant part in the gratification it affords. So, whilst the Picturesque figure remains self-absorbed with merely an occluded view of the world, the socially advantaged aesthete looks far and wide and searches out configurations in the landscape that, when ideally 'framed', reveal a sense of the harmonies in life and nature available to the enlightened observer.

David Punter interprets an extract from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal as evidence of a search for this kind of confirmation; that is to say, a confirmation of ideas already held rather than a quest for nature undiscovered. The account is from 1803 when she, Wordsworth and Coleridge were travelling near Loch Lomond. Encountering a view of a craggy-topped mountain and the 'frame-like uniformity of the side-screens of the lake' the three called out 'That's what we wanted!' Punter comments:

> '…I find a deeper mythic resonance in the cry of "That's what we wanted!" This scene appears to be one version of what the eye might want because it is essentially confirmatory; it does not open avenues towards unconsoling experiences of the outer, but instead relates back direct to the past, to the possibility that the wishes harboured and imaged in the inner world were somehow all along not fruitless or the result of pointless and unenviable solitude; instead this shows that 'we' were on the right track, that the comforting and nostalgic images of an ordered, tamed universe had some primal connection with the way things really are' (Punter 1994: 226–227).

Returning to the two photographs of Roger Fenton it now becomes possible, through some of their differences and similarities, to begin to discuss what might

count as a general principle of Picturesque construction in photography, in as much as the compositional devices employed connect with early Picturesque painting. Both images offer a vantage point that permits an extensive, all-encompassing view. Although a high-angle viewpoint is not the rule in Picturesque painting Fenton's use of it here is a means by which a deep recession is achieved. Furthermore, by so doing, Fenton enables us to see detail at every plane within the image, in much the same way that Claude's painting gives us content within a distinct fore, middle and background. In *The Terrace and Park at Harewood House* (1860) our foreground is the terrace of the house. The middle ground, as with Claude's painting and many others that are similar, uses water for visual interest in this plane. Beyond the balustrade of the terrace we look down on a large, distant lake surrounded by trees. In the furthermost distance hills recede to the point where their faint grey tones merge with the horizon. In *Mill at Hurst Green* (1859) our foreground is the beginning of a winding country lane, which, from our high viewpoint, we can trace back to the middle distance. At this point a river is visible and we lose sight of the lane as it snakes its way around to the right behind a clump of trees. Further back we see cottages and beyond this the tops of distant hills.

In terms of side-screens, the first image is not strongly set within a framing device but there is an ornate fountain structure in the bottom left corner of the image that provides some sense of compositional containment. In addition, the mass of trees around the lake is densest on this side, and this gives further compositional weight, balancing the group of figures that is spread along the edge of the foreground, just to the right of centre. *Mill at Hurst Green*, by contrast, has a far more pronounced side-screen device on the left-hand side of the picture. This takes the form of the Mill itself, a large stone-built structure, nestled within dense foliage. Beyond the mill, the dark shadows of tall trees also help to build the mass on this side. Our eye is led immediately to the very centre of the image where two men are talking to one another on a promontory overlooking the river. On the right-hand side of the image, in the foreground, the serpentine curve of the lane leads us to this point. Though small in the frame the figures are brightly lit against the dark tones of the river and the trees behind them and our position is ideal to

both appreciate this effect and to draw the various elements of the picture together.

What I would argue, however, is that it is not solely the more pronounced use of side-screen framing that connects *Mill at Hurst Green* more affirmatively with the Picturesque aesthetic. It is the fact that in *The Terrace and Park at Harewood House* the cluster of figures on the terrace share our view of the landscape. Although not looking towards the distant view their proprietorial presence impedes our ability to form a unified whole and take possession of the scene. That this group of figures represents an obstacle to the kind of gratifying self-containment discussed above is not simply brought about by signs of elevated social class, although this does seem to rule out Barrell's 'delightfully simple state of mind'. The difference their presence makes is that from their own purpose-built vantage point the scene is already possessed. We have less scope to pull the visual threads together and form a scene that defines us as the omniscient subject.

We are not faced with this problem in *Mill at Hurst Green*. Within the scene there are six figures, principally divided into conversing pairs or individuals going about their business. None sees the world as we see it. From their dress we might assume they are working people whose view of the world is occluded. The nearest figure, a man walking away from us, cannot see the approaching figure further along the lane since the curve of the lane prevents this. No one but we can appreciate the compositional harmony or intricacy of textures (of which they are a part). None can be as fully aware as we of the sense of social harmony and natural order conveyed as this would require an urban perspective and our instinct tells us these simple people are too perfectly embedded in rustic life to understand the malaise of urban discontent.

To make such assumptions about the mindset of the inhabitants of *Mill at Hurst Green* we would of course be projecting onto them our own ideas and perhaps also revealing some of our own anxieties about the world and our relationship with it. In relation to this it is interesting to ponder exactly what it was about rural inhabitants that the wealthy aesthetes of the Picturesque found so enticing. In *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, Sidney K. Robinson tells us:

> Early, more undeveloped stages in the evolution of culture and technology, as well as lower economic levels within a given society, provide artefacts that delight more powerful visitors in search of a restorative glance at simplicity. Viewed from a comfortable cushion of well-being, more primitive peoples seem to live a life of direct expression and natural continuity (Robinson. 1991: 94).

In the case of contemporary examples of Picturesque effect, one could say that there is some delight in simplicity to be found in Kander's *Bathers*, *Yibin, Sichuan.* Whilst the conditions giving rise to the circumstances of the bathers may be steeped in social, economic and political complexity, the observer's eye is prepared to latch onto the bathers' apparent embeddedness and micro perspective on their 'wild' existence. From our vantage point we cohere the scene and pull together the compositional elements to form a Picturesque whole. The left-hand side of the image is dominated by a side screen in the form of a huge rock face that runs down to the water's edge. This extends to the foreground where an edge-on view of its sedimentary layers contributes an expanse of roughened texture. The rock face extends almost to the middle of the picture but is just to the left to enable our distant view. On the horizon, a faint outline of a bridge disappears into a Claude-like misty haze. As in *Mill at Hurst Green* the focal point of the image is human activity, the small group of bathers standing on a rock, starkly outlined by the river behind them. On the right-hand side, in the middle ground, is the farther bank of the Yangtse. On it we see a factory with a tall chimney where ordinarily there might be the ruin of a castle or abbey if this were a Picturesque painting rather than a photograph.

Even when no Picturesque Other is incorporated the ennobling effects of Picturesque composition may still be felt. Burtynsky's *Tire Pile #8*, Westley, *California, USA* (1999) presents us a mountainous pile of discarded tyres. Worn and muddy, their intricate texture spreads to the edges of the image. But Burtynsky composes his shot in such a way that we are able to see the horizon. A break in the tyre pile is aligned with our position as viewer and we feel a sense of mastery as the parted sea of tyres seems to confirm our right to visually penetrate with nothing standing in our way. In the original Picturesque a clearing in the landscape permitted a deep, omniscient view and this seems to have carried

through into its contemporary photographic equivalent. In *Oil Fields #22* Burtynsky uses side screens of trees to guide us to the centre where our eye follows oil pipelines zig-zagging their way into the distance.

Fig. 14 Edward Burtynsky Tire Pile #8, Wstley, California, USA (1999)

Many of Kander's *Yangzte, Long River* images allow the inhabitants of the scene to be dwarfed by their surroundings. One exception is *Chongqing IV (Sunday Picnic).* In this image a group of young people are seated around a table in the foreground. As with *Bathers* we are urged to marvel at their indifference to the urbanness of their recreational space. The tables are dressed with lace cloths and sit on a 'beach' made of rubble. Behind them is a forest of concrete pillars supporting an elevated road, their vast scale and flaking paint affirming the idea of industrial ruination. Whist the majority of the group seem at ease and oblivious to the photographer's presence, one member looks towards the camera, seemingly bothered by the intrusion. It is only now that, in feeling ourselves discovered, our pleasure in looking becomes less easy.

Fig. 15 Nadav Kander *Chongqing IV (Sunday Picnic)* (2007)

Lamenting the way in which progress in agriculture interferes with Picturesque effect Uvedale Price noted that, '… gypsies and vagrants give way to less picturesque figures of husbandmen and their attendants' (Price, 1794: 294). Judging by the discussions of the theorists of the Picturesque and the paintings that informed their ideas we might gather from this that it was the less industrious who were seen as the more aesthetically rewarding and that shepherds, 'gypsies and vagrants' (to quote Price) were the favoured examples. I have used the past tense here but it may well be that vestiges of the original Picturesque principles are still with us and that the phenomenon of an aestheticized, non-industrious poor in some way remains. Pausing for a moment to consider this, we might begin by asking in what sense might shepherds, and 'vagrants and gypsies' represent any kind of unified group? The grounds for arguing against this possibility seem abundant and needless to say, in relation to the present day, further difficulties come to the fore. The notion that Gypsies, for instance, in anyway enhance natural beauty would, no doubt, be strongly contested by certain factions of the rural community, as well as by Gypsy communities too, which continues to

struggle against stereotyping and objectification. And yet this is not an entirely moot point since Western culture of the late twentieth century and beyond remains littered with examples of the romanticized gypsy from bric-a-brac ornaments to advertising and cinema. And at the time of writing an internet search informs me that, should I wish to, I could tour the countryside in a gypsy caravan, safe in the knowledge that 'even the harness is authentic'.[1]

A common factor held by shepherds, vagrants and ‘gypsies’, at least in their mythical form, is their wandering existence. Whilst Price recognized the aesthetic potential of the poor residing in hovels, the nomadic poor, it would seem, were especially valued for their unsettled way of life and circumvention of the established social and economic order. It could be argued such characters were valued not so much for their close contact with nature as for their separation from the constrictions of modern society and that the image of the wanderer, unburdened by civilization’s rules and demands, was primarily an expression of internal anxiety and unconscious desire. The ‘gypsy’, in particular, could be regarded as an extreme form of dislocation from the economic order and settled urban living since the itinerancy associated with Gypsies is perceived to be cultural and goes beyond individual circumstance. In his essay, *Picturesque Figure and Landscape: Meg Merriles and the Gypsies*, Peter Garside draws attention to the swarthy appearance of the gypsy in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century literature and painting. Garside refers us to the German scholar, Heinrich Grellmann, whose *Dissertation on the Gipsies* (1783) is reputed to be the first appearance of the idea that gypsies were originally lower caste emigrants from India (Garside 1994: 162). Garside reminds us that in the discussions of Price and Knight the gypsy was very much seen as having a dark complexion:

> One instance emerges as he (Price) locates the Picturesque between the beautiful and the deformed in the human face: "conceive the eyebrows more strongly marked, the hair rougher in its effect and quality, the complexion more dusky and gipsy-like" (Garside 1994: 147).

[1] Holidays in gypsy caravans, at the time of writing, are offered by a number of companies in Britain and Ireland. The company referred to is presently found at www.horsedrawncaravan.com

The recognition of the Picturesque figure as 'foreign' in both appearance and lifestyle immediately suggests an Orientalist dimension to the early Picturesque painting and potentially an ongoing dialectic with Otherness in any descendant of Picturesque effect. This brings us to the question of the Picturesque gaze and a more probing examination of the relationship between the viewer and the Picturesque figure. So far in this chapter I have outlined some of the formal devices that help to create what might be termed an ennobled viewpoint; by which I mean, the positioning of the viewer in relation to the Picturesque (and perhaps picturesque) landscape is not unlike the vantage point assumed by the social elite when enjoying the Picturesque prospect. The view is expansive; organized in such a way that the eye of the observer completes the geometry of the picture; and inhabitants of the scene, like the scene itself, appear as the possession of the viewer’s clear-sighted observation. But (as with the trompe l’oeil) this sense of mastery, though impressive, is fragile. A step or two away from the vantage point reveals the illusion on which the effect is based. In this case, it could be said that there is potentially a reversal of roles where the ennobled subject becomes the object of scrutiny.

Raimonda Mondiano argues that destitutes in Picturesque aesthetics were salvational figures 'embodying the landed gentry's ideals of self-sufficiency and independence' (Mondiano 1994: 196). Drawing from Freud and Klein, he develops an idea of rustics, beggars and gypsies functioning as narcissistic ego ideals. A significant point for Mondiano is their self-absorption and indifference to the ways in which identity is defined by property: '…destitutes embody a strong anti-proprietary code of ethics which counteracts the prevalent tendency, in this period of vast agricultural reform, to treat landscape as property' (Ibid.,196). Mondiano applies Freud's idea of ego libido – the state of primary narcissism – being displaced in adulthood. Primary narcissism, Freud tells us, is redirected towards an ego ideal, an object which, 'like the infantile ego, deems itself the possessor of all perfections' (Freud 1914: 116). Mondiano’s contention reverses the idea that the viewer takes pleasure in a sense of ‘ownership’ of the aesthetically dishevelled figure. Instead, he proposes that the relationship between viewer and destitute is one in which a psychical need is met with the destitute functioning as

the embodiment of a desirable state of perfection and independence. The destitute, we might say, answers a lack in the viewer who responds to a fantasy of unity in which a sense of self is no longer dependent on an Other. The idea of the Picturesque representing a kind of wholeness at a psychical level deserves consideration as examination of the formal components of the Picturesque has already shown that order, coherence and self-containment are some of its defining characteristics. But in making such an analysis it is the work of Lacan we should turn to, since at the core of Lacanian thinking is the idea of the subject driven by a desire for a return to a state of wholeness, beyond the limitations of the symbolic order. For Lacan, a separation that begins with the mirror stage remains as an unresolvable absence within language. Shifting the discussion more towards Lacan, the explanation of the term 'ego ideal' needs to be revisited to take account of Lacan's precise differentiation between ego-ideal and ideal-ego. For Lacan, it is the latter that is the desired self image - the flawless image of oneself that is envisioned in the imaginary order. Ego-ideal on the other hand correlates with the sense of self in the symbolic order and is the self as pictured by the big Other. In essence it is what the subject would need to be in order to gain approval from the Other. This outside view of ourselves is crucial to our sense of subjective self. It is in these terms that we can understand the term *gaze* to be not the objectifying look of an empowered observer – as it is frequently misunderstood to be in discussions of film and photography theory – but the subject's sense of external observation emanating from a point of light that illuminates their presence in the world.[2] It can be understood as an imagined returned look from the position of object, scrutinizing and objectifying the subjective self.

Slavov Zizek points out that, 'the gaze marks the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already gazed at, i.e., it is the object gazing at me' (Zizek, 1992: 125). Lacan's seminars on vision have been described as not without 'syntactic ambiguity' (Scott 2008: 327) but he is clear in his contention that subjectivity is not a constant and problem-free state of being. According to Lacan

[2] The tendency to connect the word *gaze* with an empowered and objectifying observer has been challenged by writers such as Joan Copjec and Slavov Zizek. For evidence that this tendency remains in spite of these challenges see Wells, L. (2011) *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, London/NY: I.B. Taurius, p197.

the subject is traumatized and divided by the mirror stage and a split subject thereafter desires a return to the corporeal wholeness it once had. The symbolic order offers signification of subject status but falls short of providing a tangible answer to that which is desired. Far from putting forward the idea of a subject that wields the gaze as a weapon, Lacan indicates subjectivity to be nebulous and unstable. It is an effect of language that can be undone by the gaze of the object.

Lacan introduces the separation of the look from the gaze in In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*: 'the eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field' (Lacan 1979: 72). Lacan indicates that the gaze should be seen as a negation of the Cartesian cogito in which vision is understood as a one-way funneling of information to an absorbing stable subject. Lacan instead describes the scopic field as a dynamic in which the subject accedes to objectification in the sense that in order to exist as subject in the world one must be seen by it. We look and conceive of ourselves as acknowledged observers in a two-way 'face to face' exchange. It is when the subject feels adrift from this axis that the threat of the gaze is sensed. Lacan illustrates this in his analysis of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533). Holbein's distinguished travellers are presented to the viewer as a symbolic expression of status and achievement. Objects indicating knowledge of science and the arts occupy a high table between the two statesmen. Any gratification the viewer might take from this, however, is short-lived as Holbein's anamorphic skull in the foreground relocates the viewer to an alternative position. From this oblique view only the reminder of death is clearly seen - the main content of the painting is distorted and in effect now addresses an empty subject space. Todd McGowan summarizes the implication of this off-centre position:

> ‘It makes clear the effect of subjective activity on what the subject sees in the picture, revealing that the picture is not simply there to be seen and that seeing is not a neutral activity.' The skull says to the spectator, "you think you are looking at the painting from a safe distance, but the painting sees you - takes into account your presence as a spectator." Hence, the existence of the gaze as a disruption (or a stain) in the picture - an objective gaze - means that spectators never look on from a safe distance; they are in the picture in the form of this stain, implicated in the text itself.' (McGowan 2007: 7).

The viewer, who ordinarily is 'seen' by the picture as subject/viewer, now finds they are seen but dismissed. It is a shift that snatches them away from the symbolic order and lands them in a confrontation with the real. Lacan's point here is not so much to affirm the significance of memento mori as to convey that, as McGown states, seeing is not a neutral activity. It is the means by which the subject pursues an affirming perspective on the world with vision aiding the construction of a centralized self. In either case, however, the viewer is in the picture and this raises the question of whether the viewer of the Picturesque can equally be regarded as 'implicated in the text'. I have so far indicated that the Picturesque effect relies upon a feeling of being outside looking in but if the relationship between viewer and Picturesque is only this there is a conflict with Lacan's notion of the scopic field where a two-way dynamic is said to exist. One explanation might be that the Picturesque is effective in suppressing any sense of being seen by the picture but before going any further it is necessary to clarify Lacan's account of how the subject negotiates the gaze.

Fig.16 Hans Holbein *The Ambassadors* (1553)

In the seminar *What is a Picture?* Lacan introduced his double dihedron schema to represent the opposition of eye and gaze (Lacan 1979: 106). Two overlapping triangles are shown on a horizontal axis, one pointing left and the other right such that their overlap creates a bow tie-like configuration. The left-hand side is labeled 'the gaze' and the other, 'the subject of representation'. We are shown that the subject's look meets the counter flow of the gaze and that subject exists only is as much as the outside world looks at the subject. In the centre a vertical line is labelled 'image/screen' indicating that the eye sees not the object but the image and the gaze sees not the self but an outward projection of it. It is the screen that defends against the gaze, it prevents the subject from being overwhelmed by its penetrating light. But the screen exists only on this axis and takes effect within the two-way exchange with the gaze as object. In *The Ambassadors* we are repositioned by the anamorphism to a point where the screen cannot protect us. We are, as it were, off the axis of subjectivity and we confront the real rather than engage in dialectical exchange with the symbolic order.

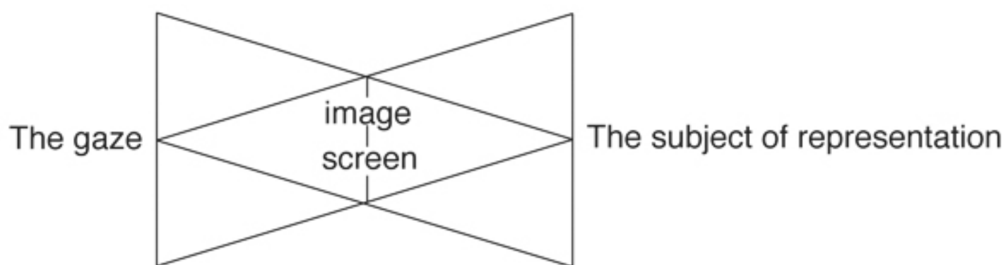

Fig. 17 Lacan's double dihedron schema representing the opposition of eye and gaze

Lacan's own anecdotal account of how this might be experienced can be connected with the discussion of an objectified poor in the Picturesque. Lacan describes how as a young man wanting to 'get away and see something different' he found himself on a fishing boat with a group of fishermen from Brittany, in a region that 'was not as industrialized as it is now'. One fisherman, pointing to a sardine can floating in the water asks him if he can see it. Lacan becomes the butt of the fishermen's joke when he is told 'well, it doesn't see you'. In his analysis of the humour of the incident (for the fishermen) Lacan emphasizes their difference to himself and the way in which his identity among 'fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature'

was all at once reduced to nothing (Lacan, 1979: 96). Lacan's 'getting away to see something different' we could say is not unlike the experience pursued by the Picturesque traveller. In either case there existed the potential for impoverished rustics to play a part in affirming the experience of difference for the urban traveller. Lacan connects the returned gaze – which cancels out his own subjective vision - with the self-awareness that follows as a result of the fishermen turning the tables and refusing to be the property of his look. Although, in Lacan's account, it is not through the eyes of the fishermen that the gaze emanates, it is they who trigger Lacan's inability to remain the detatched observer; his sense of objectification in the external world leads him to feel more implicated in the scene. The object of his look, in effect, asks why are you looking and what do you desire through looking?

The conclusion we might draw from this is that in picturing his experience Lacan felt a transformation in his conception of himself: one moment feeling himself to be an observer of 'fellows earning their living with great difficulty' and the next feeling his observer status annulled. The sardine can that 'glittered in the sun' was a point of light illuminating the scene from a viewing position that was beyond Lacan's ability to master the scene, a blot in his field of vision. Caught unaware by the joke at his expense the screen of his projected self could not shield him from a gaze that interrogated the purpose of his presence on the boat. For the Picturesque tourists of the eighteenth century a similar experience might have been felt on entering sites such as Tintern Abbey. Gilpin was clearly disturbed by the presence of a savvy poor amid the ruins of the abbey who seemed well-used to relieving the tourist class of their money in exchange for guidance to lesser-known points of interest. A rural poor at a distance was believed to offer an enhancing effect but close-up there was always a risk of aesthetic non-compliance with the viewer becoming acutely aware of their existence in the 'picture'.

In his book *Looking Awry* Zizek applies Lacan's concept of the gaze to the viewing of a number of Hollywood films, among them George Stevens' western *Shane* (1956). The interest for Zizek in this particular movie is the way in which it introduces a nostalgia for the western itself. Zizek poses the question how does a

western imply 'a kind of nostalgic distance toward the universe of westerns' and function 'as its own myth'? (Zizek 1992: 113). Zizek's conclusion is that the story being told through the eyes of a child means 'the real object of fascination is not the displayed scene but the gaze of the naïve "other" absorbed, enchanted by it' (ibid. 114). Zizek, however, identifies a conflict in this with Lacan's idea of antinomy between eye and gaze. He points out 'such a logic of fascination by which the subject sees in the object (in the image it views) its own gaze, i.e., by which, in the viewed image, it "sees itself seeing," is defined by Lacan as the very illusion of perfect self-mirroring that characterizes the Cartesian philosophical tradition of the subject of self-reflection' (ibid.). But Zizek finds a solution to this:

> 'The answer to our problem is clear: the function of the nostalgic object is precisely to conceal the antinomy between eye and gaze - i.e., the traumatic impact of the gaze qua object - by means of its power of fascination. In nostalgia, the gaze of the other is domesticated, "gentrified"; instead of the gaze erupting like a traumatic, disharmonious blot, we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing," of seeing the gaze itself. In a way, we could say that the function of fascination is precisely to blind us to the fact that the other is already gazing at us' (Zizek 1992: 114).

Applied to the Picturesque, which can be regarded as a nostalgic object, this would mean we experience it in a vicarious way, with a feeling that what we see we see through the eyes of a naive other. With the fusion of our vision with that of the rural other there is no challenge of the gaze and no annulment of our right to look. The problem here, however, is that it contradicts the idea that a position of social and physical advantage is key to the Picturesque effect. Unless, that is, the subject/object relationship is entirely within ourselves and that within this 'toing and froing' between omniscient view and innocent perception we ultimately desire ourselves as object. Just as Mondiano proposes the idea that destitutes in the Picturesque are Freudian ego-ideals, Zizek's suggestion that in nostalgia the gaze is gentrified brings us to the conclusion that the viewer is very much in the picture, oscillating between a subject/object position in an unthreatening negotiation of the scopic field. Lacan regarded subjectivity as unsettled and the symbolic order as unable to fully resolve the lack that drives the subject towards the corporeal. Perhaps in this sense the Picturesque plays out this opposition of desires – the desire to exist as subject and the desire to recover a lost physicality.

If nostalgia plays a part in suppressing the gaze through encouraging an identification with the destitute it should not be overlooked that formal devices within the Picturesque also help to accomplish this. From our 'terrace' position we feel ourselves to occupy a vantage point that is social as well as physical. The deep recession of the Picturesque landscape, the side-screens that channel our vision away from the edges of the frame, the illusion of haphazardness, are all means by which we attain our sense of mastery. The Picturesque composition is itself a defense against the possibility of a returned gaze. Our omniscient view elevates our status in the interplay of territories in and around the picture. It is a noble vantage point bestowing on us the right to observe and comprehend. Just as in the eighteenth century, when country houses began to be built on higher ground to take full advantage of their newly-acquired Picturesque gardens, our vantage point on the Picturesque scene provides us with the impression that the outside world forever anticipates our look and presents itself with our observations in mind.